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Reforms of Sasanian king Khusro I and the northern bank of the Araxes – Arrān (Caucasus Albania)

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Abstract: *The article considers the Sasanian king Khusro I Anushirwan's reforms to improve the empire's military and administrative architecture in the northwestern region of Ērānšahr, by creating the kust ī Ādurbādagān. The authors believes that it was a key element in the Sasanian strategy to enforce both central and military power in the defense sensitive Caucasia. The authors argues that the reform initiated the projecting of Ādurbādagān's name, military, and administrative functions in Arrānšahr forming a strong interrelationship between the southern and northern sides of the Araxes as the entire Ādurbādagānšahr. Since Late Antiquity, Ādurbādagān and Arrān became interchangeable names and were in use on the northern bank of the Araxes.*

Key words: History, Iran, Sasanians, Khusro Anushirwan, Ādurbādagān, the Darband pass, Caucasus Albania, Arrān, Azerbaijan

Introduction

The permanent struggle with Rome/Byzantium to dominate the Near East[1] prompted the Sasanians to rethink and redesign the empire's architecture to improve its military might and administrative stability.[2] This strategic perception was realized not only because of the war with the Byzantines but also for the devastating invaders' incursions deep into Ērānšahr from the Darband pass in Caucasia. This political and military reality forced the Sasanians to re-discover and re-evaluate the strategical importance of Arrān (Ἀλβανία),[3] an ancient country of eastern Transcaucasia, lay

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[1] Maksymiuk, 2015a.
[2] Lawrence & Wilkinson 2017.
[3] Bais, 2001; Farrokh, Sánchez-Gracia & Maksymiuk, 2019.

essentially within the great triangle of land formed by the junction of the Rivers the Kura (Cyrus) and the Aras (Araxes).[4]

Arrān in the Sasanian military strategy in the 3rd-5th centuries

When in 224 Arashir I (Ardaxšahr, 224-242) has come out against the Arsacid dynasty, in defense of the Parthian royal house among the countries of Armenia, Media Atropatene (Āδurbāyagān / Ἀτροπατηνή) and Iberia (Viruzān / Ἰβηρία) stood Arrān.[5] The pacification of these provinces was carried out only by the son of the founder of the new dynasty – Shapur I (Šābuhr, 242-272), in 252/253.[6] The trilingual inscription *Res Gestae Divi Saporis* at Naqš-e Rostam lists on the Sasanian court, Shapur's eldest son Hormizd-Ardashir (Ōhrmazd-Ardaxšahr) as great king of Armenia,[7] and Hamazāsp, king of Iberia.[8] Arrān appears among the lands of Ērānšahr listed,[9] while defining the geographic extent of his power, Shapur states that in the northern direction it extended until forward to the Caucasus mountains and the Albans' gate.

dā frāz ō kab kōf ud arrānān dar
yaδ frāž ō kab kōf ud arrānān bar
ἕως ἔμπροσθεν Καπ ὄρους καὶ πυλῶν Ἀλβανῶν[10]

Although Kartir's inscription, dating to the reign of Wahram II (Warahrān, 276-293) places the Caucasus provinces outside the area of Ērānšahr,[11] they were undoubtedly within the sphere of Iranian influence. This is confirmed by one of the clauses of the peace treaty concluded in 298, according to which Narseh (293-302) recognized the Roman protectorate in Iberia.[12] Arrān's affiliation was not negotiated, suggesting that it was an integral part of the Sasanian Empire.

According to Gadjiev proves the beginning of reign of Arsacid dynasty in the Caucasian Albania were a consequence of the Nisibin peace treaty of 298 and fact that "the Sasanians effectively withdrew from the Caucasian political arena for almost

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[4] About the history of Arrān in Antiquity, see Chaumont, 1985; Bosworth, 1986. See also Fabian, 2020; Bais, 2023; Gippert & Dum-Tragut, 2023.
[5] Cass. Dio, 80.3.3; Zonar., 12.15; Agathangelos, 1.19; Moses Khorenatsʿi, 2.71.
[6] Disscusion in Hartmann (2006) 106, note 5.
,[7] ŠKZ 23/18/41: Ohrmezd Ardašīr vuzurg šāh Arminān / Ohrmezd Ardašīr vuzurg šāh Arminīn / Ὀρμισδαρταξιρ τοῦ μεγάλου βασιλέως Ἀρμενίας
[8] ŠKZ 31/25/60: (H)amāzāsp Wiruzān šāh / (H)amāzāsp Wiržān šāh / Ἀμαζάσπου τοῦ βασιλέως τῆς Ἰβηρίας; see also Stickler, 2021.
[9] ŠKZ 2/2/3.
[10] ŠKZ 2-3/2/3-4.
[11] KKZ 17-19/37-40/11-12.
[12] Petrus Patricius, frag. 14; Maksymiuk & Hossein Talaee, 2022: 148.

40 years".[13] The seizure of power in Iran by Shapur II (309-379), one of whose objectives was the cancellation of the 298 treaty,[14] has activated Sasanian activities in the Caucasus region. In the 330s, Shapur forcing the Arsacid Albanian king Vache I (Vačʻē / Vačʻagan, 336 ca.-350) to acknowledge Sasanian suzerainty. Mutual rapprochement was strengthened by dynastic ties. Uṙnayr the king of Arrān (ca. 350-ca. 375) was married to the daughter of Shapur II, and probably the result of this relationship was a later Albanian king Aswagen (Āhzwahēn, ca. 415-440).[15]

Ammianus Marcellinus confirms participation of Albanian contingent in the armies of Shapur II during the siege of Amida, in 359. More importantly, from the description of the Roman historian, it appears that the king of Albania held an honorable place in the immediate surroundings of the *šāhān šāh*.

> "Close by him on the left went Grumbates, king of the Chionitae, a man of moderate strength, it is true, and with shrivelled limbs, but of a certain greatness of mind and distinguished by the glory of many victories. On the right was the king of the Albani, of equal rank, high in honour. After them came various leaders, prominent in reputation and rank, followed by a multitude of every degree, chosen from the flower of the neighbouring nations and taught to endure hardship by long continued training." [16]

The Sasanian-Roman treaty of 363, which brought the four-fifths of the South Caucasus into the Iranian sphere of influence gave it a clear strategic advantage.[17] Shapur has taken an active role in the Caucasus region. He removing the pro-Roman Saurmag (361-363/370-378) from the Iberian throne,[18] and invaded Armenia, by abducting king Arshak II (Aršak, c. 350-364) into Iran, in 364.[19] The effect of the renewed intervention in Armenia in 370 was to capture the fortress of Artagerkʻ and take captive Queen Pharandzem,[20] what caused counteractions of the emperor Valens (364-378).[21] According to the Armenian sources Uṙnayr fought on the side of Iran in a battle against the Armenian-Roman army at Bagavan in 372.[22] Worthy of note is the information that Mushegh (Mušeł) Mamikonean recaptured several regions earlier conquered from Armenia by Arrān and "They set the border between the land of

[13] Gadjiev, 2020: 31.
[14] Maksymiuk, 2018.
[15] About dynastic ties, see Gadjiev, 2020: 32.
[16] Amm. Marc., 18.6.22.
[17] Maksymiuk & Hossein Talaee, 2022, with further literature.
[18] Amm. Marc., 27.12.4.
[19] Amm. Marc., 24.7.12.
[20] Amm. Marc., 27.12.11-12; The *Epic Histories*, 4.55.
[21] In 371 Valens sent troops to Iberia to restore Saurmag to the throne. Ultimately, Iberia was divided between Saurmag and Aspacures (Amm. Marc., 27.12.16-17).
[22] The *Epic Histories*, 5.4.

Aluank‘ and their own land on the Kur River, as it had been before”,[23] which suggests an earlier takeover of them by the Uṙnayr, presumably with the support of Shapur.

According to Movsēs Dasxuranċi, Arrān in the late of 4th century adopted the christianity.[24] However, it is important to emphasize the strong attachment of the Albanians to their Iranian cultural roots, manifested in the martyrdom of the St. Gregoris (the Catholicos of the Church of Caucasian Albania) in the land of the Mazkut‘ in northeast Caucasian Albania.[25] Another example is revolt of the inhabitants of the city-fortress of C‘ri against the king of Albania.[26]

The Darband pass

The appearance of the Huns in the Caucasus region forced the Sasanian dynasty to change their defensive strategy.[27] Securing the Caucasus passes (Dar’yal and Derbent) became a priority[28] which increased the importance of the Caucasus Albania in Iran’s military system.

The first Sasanian attempt to close the road running along the Caspian coast took place during the reign of the Yazdgerd II (439-457).[29] The actions of the *šāhān šāh* were due to the Hunnic invasion to the South Caucasus and Iran, about 440.[30] Echoes of the building initiative of Yazdgerd can be seen in the accounts of the *History of Karka de Beth Selok*[31] and the *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr.*

pad xwadāyīh [ī] yazdgirdī šābuhrān kard andar tāzišn ī čōl wērōy-pahr ī ān ālag
“In the reign of Yazdgird, the son of Šābuhr made it during the invasion of the Čōl,
at the boundary of the Gruznian Guard”[32]

It is likely that an agreement was made in 441, under which Rome would contribute to the cost of Iran’s defense of the Caucasus.[33]

> “As long as the Romans controlled Artaxata and the regions even beyond, they were able, since they were on the spot, to resist them (the barbarians who might come through the Caspian Gates). But when they evacuated these and other regions under Jovian,

[23] The *Epic Histories*, 5.13.
[24] Movsēs Dasxuranċi, 1.11-12, 14.
[25] The *Epic Histories*, 3.6; on the Mazkut‘, see Gadijev, 2021.
[26] Movsēs Dasxuranċi, 1.14.
[27] Greatrex & Greatrex, 1999; Semenov, 2010; Jackson Bonner, 2017: 93-101; Maksymiuk, 2024.
[28] Maksymiuk, 2017/2018.
[29] See also Kudryavtsev, 1978; Gadjiev, 1980; Gadjiev, 1989: 61-76.
[30] See Semenov, 2007, 39-9; Payne, 2015.
[31] Hoffmann, 1880: 50: “Und er zog nach der Provinz (Land) Tšōl und unterwarf den dortigen Klein-König und baute daselbst eine Stadt und nannte sie nach seinem Namen Šahrestān Jazdgerd.”
[32] the *Šahrestānīhā ī Ērānšahr*, 18.
[33] See Maksymiuk, 2016: 149-51.

> the Persians were unable to defend both their own and the former Roman territory, and unbearable turmoil constantly gripped the Armenias subject to each state. Therefore, after the failure under Julian, talks were held between Salutius, who was then prefect, and the Persian grandees and later with Yazdgerd, in order that, sharing the cost, both states should build a fortress on the aforementioned pass and bring help to the area in checking the barbarians who were overrunning it. But since the Romans were embroiled in wars in the west and north, the Persians, insofar as they were more exposed to the barbarians' incursions, were compelled to build the fortress against them there, naming it Biraparakh in their own language and establishing a garrison there. And the enemy was unable to effect an entrance." (transl. by Blockley)[34]

Without a doubt, the Biraparakh fortress mentioned in the text should be identified with Darband, not the Dar'yal pass in the central Caucasus.[35] It was probably about the reconstruction of the Darband, belonged to the kingdom of Albania. Gadjiev presumes that "the construction of a mud-brick fortification in the Derbent pass, which completely blocked the 3-kilometer passage, and the construction of a grand (over 100 hectares) fortress-city 25 km south of the Derbent pass", was the first stage of Sasanian military construction in the region.[36] It is also possible that Yazdgerd II introduced the office of *marzbān* (guardian of the border) of Darband, which suggests a text of Movsēs Dasxuranċi.

> "The first they entrusted to Neršapuh Rmbosean to protect Atrpatakan, the second to Vardan, the general of Armenia, to cross the Georgian border to attack the marzpan of Čołay who had come to destroy the churches of Albania."[37]

According to written sources the fortifications were destroyed during the uprising by a group of Armenian nobility, led by Vardan Mamikonean, in 450. The reason for the revolt, which was joined by some of the Albanian nobility, was Yazdgerd's edict requiring Christians of the Armenia, Albania and Iberia to adopt Mazdaism.[38]

> "Then they attacked with no little ardor the fortresses and towns which the Persians held in Albania ... Many of the Albanian nobles and of the general peasantry ... when they saw the success of the enterprise which God had effected through the Armenian army, they too assembled and joined their forces. Together and in concert they shared in

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[34] Joh. Lyd. De Mag., 3.52; see also Priscus, fr. 41; An inscription from the reign of the emperor Marcian (450-457) supposedly discovered in Darband in 716, cited by Łewond, 12: "The autocrat Emperor Marcianus built the city and this tower with ample funds from his own treasury."
[35] Discussion in Kettenhofen, 1994; see also Gadjiev, 2013.
[36] Gadjiev, 2021a: 214.
[37] Movsēs Dasxuranċi, 2.2; On the *marzbān* see Khurshudian, 2015: 76-95.
[38] Jullien, 2021: 5-6.

the heroic task. Then they marched against the pass of the Huns, which the Persians were holding in force. They captured and destroyed the fortifications, slaughtered the troops quartered inside"[39]

After Yazdegerd's death, the Albanian king Vache II (ca. 440-462), the nephew (son of a sister) of the deceased *šāhān šāh*,[40] has not recognized the supremacy of Peroz (Pērōz, 459-484), who seized power by removing from the throne his brother, Hormozd III (Ōhrmazd, 457-459).[41] Vache let pass the Mazkut'ʿs through the Darband pass, and in alliance with them took military action against Iranian troops.

"The king of Albania, however, had no desire to submit to him as a vasal, but threw open the gates of Čołay and led in the forces of the Mask'ut'k'; he allied himself to the eleven mountain kings, opposed the Aryan army in battle and inflicted great losses upon the royal forces."[42]

Peroz's response was to let through the Dar'yal pass, the Huns, who then ravaged Albania.[43] The conflict ended with an agreement imposed by the *šāhān šāh*. As a result of which Vache mother (Peroz's sister) and daughter were taken to Ctesiphon.[44] A symbolic gesture of dependence was the construction of the city of Pērōzabād (the city of Peroz),[45] which was probably the headquarters of the *marzbān*. Vache II abdicated in 462.[46]

After about 30 years of interregnum, the *šāhān šāh* Balash (Wālaxš, 484-488) introducted the last king of Caucasian Albania from the Arsacid dynasty – Vache III the Pious (ca. 485-510). At that time the renaming of the city of Pērōzabāt to P'artaw took place, which has become the new capital of Albania (thus replacing Kabala).[47] Probably the Albanian king Vache participated in the capture of the city of Amida by the *šāhān šāh* Kavadh I (Kawād, 488-531), in 503.

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[39] Ełišē, 129.
[40] Gadjiev, 2020: 32.
[41] Maksymiuk, 2015b: 166 ; Syvänne, 2021: 96.
[42] Movsēs Dasxuranči, 1.10; see also Ełišē, 242: "Although profound peace had been brought to the land of the Aryans, the king of Albania did not wish to submit, but breached the Pass of Chor and brought through to this side the troops of the Massagetae. Uniting with the eleven kings of the mountains, he waged war against the Aryan army and inflicted much damage on the royal forces".
[43] Ełišē, 242: "…they opened the Pass of the Alans, brought through a numerous force of Huns, and warred for a year with the Albanian king."; Movsēs Dasxuranči, 1.10; see also Bíró, 1997: 55-6.
[44] Movsēs Dasxuranči, 1.10.
[45] Movsēs Dasxuranči, 1.15: "A great town Perozapat was built by Vač'ē by order of Peroz, king of Persia, and is now called Partaw."
[46] Gadjiev, 2020: 33.
[47] Gadjiev, 2017: 124.

> "a Christian prince of the country of Aran pleaded with the king on behalf of one church, called the Great Church of the Forty Martyrs and he spared it while it was full of people"[48]

According to Procopius of Caesarea, Ambazoukes the Hun (probably the Sabir), temporarily occupied Darband, shortly after the Anastasian War of 502-506.[49] After his death, the *šāhān šāh* Kavadh annexed this territory to Iran.[50]

The *kust ī* Ādurbādagān

Khusro I Anushirwan (Husraw Anōšag-rūwān, 531-579) had implemented a series of reforms, possibly originating during the previous reign of Kavadh.[51] The basis of military reform in 6th century CE was replacement of the single commander the *Erānspāhbed / artēštārān sālār* by four *spāhbeds* beholden directly to the king.[52] Each of four *spāhbeds* was assigned to the four cardinal points of the Sasanian empire. The quadripartition was employed: a quarter of the northeast (*kust ī xwarāsān spāhbed*), a quarter of the southeast (*kust ī nēmrōz spāhbed*), a quarter of the southwest (*kust ī xwarbārān spāhbed*) and a quarter of the northwest (*kust ī Ādurbādagān spāhbed*). It is problematic due to differences in the source accounts to determine exactly which regions were assigned to which *kust ī*.[53]

The purpose of introducing the reform was primarily increase of the operational efficiency of the Iranian army. It should be noted at this point that the quadripartition is directly related to wall-systems of defense: the Wall of Darband, the Walls of Tammīša and Gorgān, and *War ī Tāzīgān*.[54]

According to Daryaee the term *abāxtar* (north) was generally avoided because of its negative religious connotation,[55] therefore a quarter of the northwest received a name *kust ī* Ādurbādagān. It seems natural to name it after the central religious center in the northwestern region of Iran. The Sasanians proclaimed Zoroastrianism as the imperial religion and Ādurbādagān occupied the role of the empire's religious core,

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[48] Zacharias Rhetor, 7.4.

[49] Proc. *Bell*., 1.10.9-10: "When this was observed by Alexander, the son of Philip, he constructed gates in the aformentioned place and established a fort there. This was held by others in the passage of time and finally by Ambazoukes, a Hun by birth but a friend of the Romans and the emperor Anastasios. When this Ambazoukes reached old age and was near to death, he sent to Anastasios asking for money on condition that he hand the fort and the Caspian Gates over to the Romans"; Kettenhofen, 1994; *contra* Greatrex (1998: 129; 2023: 130-2), arguing for the Dar'yal pass.

[50] Proc. *Bell*., 1.10.12: "Ambazoukes died of disease not long afterward, and Kavad overpowered his sons and took possession of the Gates".

[51] Rubin, 1995; Gariboldi, 2006.

[52] Ṭabarī, 894; Gyselen, 2001a; Gyselen, 2001b; Gyselen, 2007.

[53] Jackson Bonner, 2011: 81-2.

[54] Alizadeh, 2014; Daryaee, 2016; Farrokh, Karamian & Karamian, 2021; Labbaf-Khaniki, 2020.

[55] Daryaee, 2007: 66; see especially Ghodrat-Dizaji, 2010.

holding the cathedral temple Ādur Gušnasp (Takht-e Solaymān in Azerbaijan)[56] as the imperial sacred fire of the highest grade. The temple was linked to the warrior class to which the Sasanian dynasty belonged itself "Ādur Gušnasp artēštārān ud spāhbedān / the sacred fire Adar Gushnasp warriors and military chieftains".[57] In addition to the obvious religious significance, attention should also be paid to the massive defensive fortifications of Takht-e Solaymān.[58]

The problem is determining the geographic extent of the *kust ī* Ādurbādagān, especially its northern border.[59] It seems that the most accurate description of the administrative division of the *kust ī* Ādurbādagān has been included in the *Geography* of Ananias of Shirak from the middle of the 7th century CE.

> "*K'usti Kapkoh*, i.e., the 'region of the Caucasian Mountains', in which there are thirteen provinces: *Atrapatakan*; *Armn* [i.e.,] Armenia; *Varjan*, i.e., Iberia; *Ṙan*, i.e., Albania; *Bałasakan*; *Sisakan*; *Aṙē*; *Gełan*; *Šančan*; *Dlmunk'*; *Dmbawand*; *Taprĕstan*; *Ṙwan*; and *Aml*, …"[60]

Authority over the entire region was entrusted to a commander with the title of the *kust ī Ādurbādagān spāhbed*. The seals of two *spāhbed*s was preserved, dating to the reign of Khusro I.

> 1/ sēdhōš ī mihrān šahr aspbed ud hujadag khusrō [wuzurg ērān]
> kust ī ādurbādagān spāhbed
> "Sēd-hōš, (of the) Mihrān (family), aspbed of the empire and «well-omned Khusrō», grandee, spāhbed of the Aryans, siede of the north"[61]

> 2/ gōrgōn ī mihrān … ud hujadag khusrō wuzurg
> ērān kust ī ādurbādagān spāhbed
> "Gōrgōn, (of the) Mihrān (family), … and «well-omned Khusrō»,
> grandee, spāhbed of the Aryans, siede of the north"[62]

There is not any doubt that function of *spāhbed* Ādurbādagān was transferred by Khusro to the Pahlav clan of Mehrān. Gōrgōn of the seals is likely to be in fact the Gołon Mihran mentioned by Sebeos when describing war in Armenia in 573-575.[63] Sed-hoš is not mentioned in any literary sources. It should be noted that members of

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[56] Ghodrat-Dizaji, 2007.
[57] *La geste d'Ardashir fils de Pâbag*, 1.13; Boyce, 1983.
[58] Labbaf-Khaniki, 2020: 49-50.
[59] Ghodrat-Dizaji, 2010.
[60] Ananias of Shirak, 72; see also Shahinyan, 2016; Khachatryan, 2022.
[61] Gyselen, 2007: 274, III/29.
[62] Gyselen, 2007: 272, III/27.
[63] Sebeos, 68, 70.

Mehrān family were assigned the s*pāhbed*s in traditional homeland of this family, i.e. Ray in Gūrgān.[64]

Arrān and the *kust ī* Ādurbādagān

The *šāhān šāh* Kavadh paid special attention to strengthening Iran's military position in the Caucasian region. This was manifested in construction activity in the region, with the aim of creating an extensive network of fortifications. Of course, this was primarily a matter of rebuilding existing fortifications. Source and archaeological accounts confirm construction work at Darband,[65] Kabala and P'artaw. During the reign of Kawadh, Baylakan was built, identified with the fortified settlement of Ören Qala (in Mil Steppe).[66] He was also to build a system of walls to secure the eastern Caucasus: the so-called Zaqatala, the "long wall Apzūt-Kavāt" and the Besh-Barmak.[67]

The Darband stone defense complex was the most prominent Sasanian defensive structure in the Caucasus.[68] Three phases of construction have been identified, dating back almost to the end of the reign of the Khusro I, in 568-570.[69] The building activity is confirmed by 19 the Middle Persian inscriptions of *āmārgar* (chief financier and tax inspector) of Ādurbādagān Dariush, dated on end of the 560s. Importantly, that they have all been carved on the northern wall of Darband.[70]

ēn ud az ēn ābarbar Dariuš [ī] Ādurbādagān āmārgar kar
"This and higher than this made by Dariush, Adurbadagan's *āmārgar*"[71]

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[64] Maksymiuk, 2015b.
[65] Gadjiev, 2006.
[66] Gadjiev, 2017.
[67] Aliev, *et al*., 2006; Gadjiev, 2017: 126-8.
[68] Kettenhofen, 1994: "The wall measured 3,650 m on the north side and 3,500 m on the south. These two sides, which were 350-450 m apart (Spasskiĭ), extended on the east to the Caspian shore, enclosing the harbor; the water level was much lower than it is today. On the southwest the city wall joined the mountain wall, which extended west more than 40 km (Arabic sources: 7 farsakhs) into the wooded, virtually impassable mountains. This fortified wall, with its seven gates, apparently connected already existing freestanding fortifications; it was never completed. The stone city wall was 4 m thick and reached a height of 18-20 m. On the north it was reinforced by seventy-three massive rectangular and round towers, spaced ca. 70 m apart, as well as by outworks at strategic points; on the south there were twenty-seven round towers at intervals of 170-200 m."
[69] Gadjiev & Kasumova, 2006: 98-114.
[70] Gadjiev & Duntsov, 2023; See also the inscription of the *marzbān* of Ādurbādagān, Barzinš in Darband, dating 553 (Pakhomov, 1929).
[71] Gadjiev & Kasumova, 2006: 51-2.

Archaeological sources from Darband correlate chronologically with the Ṭabarī's text.

> "Kisrā paid no heed to his menaces and did not offer Khāqān a single item of what he had demanded, since he had strongly fortified the region of the gates of the Ṣūl and had blocked the ways and the tracks through defiles that the Khāqān Sinjibū would have to follow in order to reach him."[72]

It should be noted that construction activity in the Caucasus region of Kavadh and Khusro was primarily in the eastern Caucasus. Archaeologically confirmed fortifications in Albania, perhaps also in Balasagan (Ultan Qalasi in Mughan Steppe[73]).

Conclusions

Arrān (Albania) in the 6th century CE become a stronghold of Iranian presence in the Caucasus. Renaiming P'artaw to Pērōzkavād (victorious Kavadh) was to emphasize the Sasanian domination in Albania. It can be assumed that the Sasanian garrisons presence in Arrān's fortresses[74] under Ādurbādagān's *spāhbed* command as well as the *kust ī* Ādurbādagān's *marzbān* location in Ardabīl[75] clearly confirm the projecting of the province Ādurbādagān political, military and administrative functions to the north over the Araxes.

In addition to military-strategic goals, the Sasanians also appear to have pursued political-religious objectives. The incorporation of the Christian states of Persian Armenia, Caucasian Albania and Iberia into the *kust ī Ādurbādagān*, realistically subjected these countries to the Zoroastrian administration of Ādurbādagān.[76] In the long run, this offered the possibility of unifying the Caucasus region on religious grounds, due to its proximity to one of the main religious centers of Ādur Gušnasp. Striving for closer ties of Ērānšahr with Arrān, the Sasanians pursued through dynastic politics – family ties with Caucasian Albania rulers.

We can see the links on both religious and dynastic grounds on a cornelian gem-seal of the Arsacids king of Albania Aswagen (the son of a sister of Shapur III and a grandson of Shapur II) from the M.A. Pirousan collection.[77] The Inscription "Aswagen, King of Albania" (Āhzwahēn i, Ārdān šāh) is accompanied by the nešan-symbol. According to Gadjiyev "the ‹‹Moon wagon›› monogram may be interpreted as a symbol of dynastic bonds with the Sasanides and of belonging to this powerful royal

[72] Ṭabarī, 896.
[73] Alizadeh, 2011.
[74] Aliev, *et al*., 2006.
[75] Balāḏori, 811.
[76] Shahinyan, 2016: 194.
[77] Gadjiyev, 2003.

family." Additionally it confirms the closeness of Arrānian nobility to the Sasanian crown using Pahlavi script on the official seals.[78]

It should be noted that the Byzantines, the Sasanian enemies, acknowledged the imperial, military, and religious values of Ādurbādagān province. In 623, the Byzantian emperor Heraclius (610-641), during the last Byzantine-Sasanian war of 602 -628 CE, occupied Ādurbādagān and sacked out the fire temple Ādur Gušnasp, aiming to crush the Sasanians' will and power to fight.[79]

The durability of Iranian traditions in Caucasus Albania, is evidenced by the fact that the local the Mihrakan family that took over in the later 6th century referred to Sasanian origin, and bore the Persian title of *Arrānšāh*.[80]

Finally, since Late Antiquity, particularly as a result of the reforms of the Sasanian King Khusro I Anushirwan, names Arrānšahr and Ādurbādagānšahr became interchangeable in the north of the Araxes, facilitating of the strengthening of the empire's military, administrative and Zoroastrian power to contain Byzantium. The following historical developments demonstrate that term Arrān (Albania) lost its political functions, surviving as a geographical or toponymical term. However, Ādurbādagān evolved into the Turkified form of Azerbaijan.[81]

Map. 1. Caucasus Region (drawing by K. Maksymiuk)

[78] See also the seal of the "the Great Catholicos of Albania and Balasakan" (kust ī Ālbān ud Balāsagān wuzurg kātolikos), in Gadjiev, 2021b: 64-6.
[79] Maksymiuk, 2017.
[80] Movsēs Dasxurančʿi, 2.17; Probably the Pahlav-Mehrān clan from North-Western parts of the empire, very likely from Gūrgān. Bosworth, 1986.
[81] Khalifa-Zadeh, 2023; Khalifa-Zadeh & Khalifazadeh, 2023.

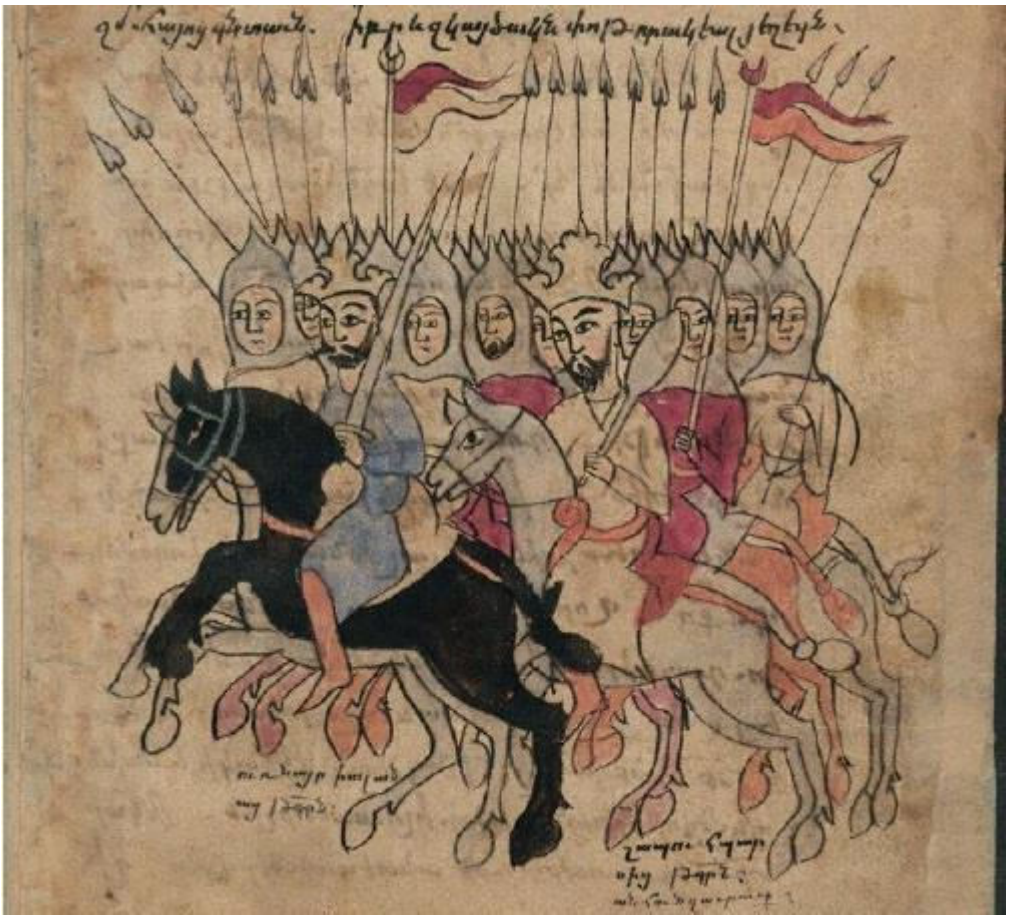

Fig. 1. Uṙnayr and Shapur in the battle of Bagavan (Ms. Berlin SBB, Or. quart. 805, fol. 212r)

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